

# State chief says community must accept retarded

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If they make a Hollywood movie about the life of Thomas A. Coughlin, the 40-year-old commissioner of the state's office of mental retardation, 1978 might be the turning point of the film. The scenario could go like this:

A sandy-haired, blue-eyed Irish kid grows up in Brooklyn, moves to upstate New York, where he marries, becomes a state trooper, and fathers three children, one of whom is multiply handicapped and retarded.

The father reluctantly puts his child in a state institution and becomes infuriated, first at the poor care she receives at the hands of the state and, second, at the complete lack of services in his hometown community.

Like a one-man wonder, Coughlin goes out and develops those services himself and, in the process, so impresses the governor that he gets appointed commissioner in charge of 18 centers for 27,000 retarded persons. The governor tells Coughlin to repeat his miracle: Set up small homes and develop services in towns all over New York State.

And that's where the movie, and Coughlin, would be today.

"It's probably the most difficult problem we face," Coughlin told the Ad-



Thomas A. Coughlin

vance editorial board last week. "We've made a major turnabout in that system, but things have begun to slow up now."

For Thomas Coughlin, for his boss, Gov. Carey, and for the residents of the state's developmental centers, now is

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